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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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THREE INDICTED IN EXOTIC BIRD TRADE STING

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that a federal grand jury sitting in Fresno returned a one-count indictment charging ERICA JIMENEZ, 21, of Fresno, California; SALVADOR DELAO, 24, of Fresno, California; and PATROCINO JIMENEZ TOVAR, 44, of Bloomington, California, with violating the Lacey Act by importing, transporting and selling Amazon parrots smuggled from Mexico. The Lacey Act prohibits importing, exporting, transporting, selling, receiving, acquiring, or purchasing any fish, wildlife or plant taken, possessed, transported, or sold in violation of any law, treaty, or regulation of the United States.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the Law Enforcement Division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Preventing the smuggling of exotic birds is one of the priorities for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in order to protect the domestic poultry industry from, among things, the potentially devastating effects of Exotic Newcastle Disease. The U.S. Department of Agriculture enforces a nationwide bird quarantine system, and all birds that may carry Exotic Newcastle Disease must be quarantined prior to their lawful entry into the United States.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, exotic Newcastle Disease, also known as Velogenic Viscerotropic Newcastle Disease, or VVND, is a destructive avian disease caused by a virus that is not found in domestic bird populations within the United States. Domestic poultry, particularly chickens, are highly susceptible to Exotic Newcastle Disease and no known medical cure exists. The disease can spread rapidly among poultry populations and requires drastic preventative action, such as eradication of entire local populations when detected. For more information please see the U.S. Department of Agriculture website, www.usda.gov.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Marlon Cobar, who is prosecuting the case with the assistance of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, the indictment alleges that from about July 10, 2003 to about December 19, 2003, the defendants knowingly engaged in, aided and abetted conduct that involved the offer of sale and purchase of, and the intent to sell Mexican Amazon parrots. The Amazon parrots were allegedly purchased in Tijuana, and smuggled across the U.S.-Mexico border by hiding the birds in paper bags and bringing them across the border in a van.

Resident Agent In Charge Scott Heard of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement for Northern California stated: "Illegal wildlife trafficking has decimated

populations of exotic birds around the world. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement is committed to enforcing the statutes and regulations pertaining to the import and export of wildlife.

United States Attorney McGregor Scott said: "Our office is pleased to join with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in this effort. The laws and regulations governing the importing of wildlife into the United States are vitally important to safeguarding our domestic resources, and will be enforced."

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

If convicted, the maximum penalty under federal law for the alleged offense is five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and a three-year term of supervised release.

The defendants are scheduled to appear on July 2, 2004, in Federal Court in Fresno, for an initial appearance.

A copy of this news release is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/home>, select Press Releases.

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